

REMARKS

Upon entry of the present amendment, the specification will have been amended to enhance the clarity thereof, and claims 2-19, 21, 26, 28-33 and 35-39 will have been amended to clarify the recitations thereof without narrowing the scope of the claims in view of the prior art. Additionally, claim 1 will have been canceled.

In view of the herein contained amendments and remarks, Applicants respectfully request reconsideration and withdrawal of each outstanding objection and rejection together with an indication of the allowability of all the claims pending in the present application. Such action is respectfully requested and is now believed to be appropriate and proper.

Initially, Applicants respectfully thank the Examiner for acknowledging their Claim for Foreign Priority under 35 U.S.C. § 119 as well as for confirming receipt of the certified copies of the foreign priority documents upon which this claim is based. Additionally, Applicants respectfully thank the Examiner for considering each of the documents cited in the Information Disclosure Statement filed in the present application on November 26, 2001 by the return of the signed and initialed PTO-1449 Form attached thereto.

Turning to the merits of the present application, the Examiner objected to claims 5, 13 and 14 because of a number of noted informalities. By the present Response, Applicants have amended most of the claims including the claims noted by the Examiner and have eliminated the terms that the Examiner found to be informal. The Examiner is respectfully thanked for bringing these matters to Applicants attention and submit that in view of the herein contained amendments, the basis for the objection to

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the claims has been overcome. An indication to such effect is respectfully requested in due course.

In the outstanding Official Action, the Examiner rejected claim 1 under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over KOBAYASHI in view of BEALE (U.S. Patent No. 5,828,710).

Applicants note that the BEALE reference was not listed on the PTO-892 Form that was attached to the outstanding Official Action nor was a copy thereof forwarded to Applicants. Accordingly, Applicants undersigned representative contacted the Examiner who forwarded a copy of the proper BEALE document to them by facsimile. The Examiner is respectfully thanked for his cooperation in this matter and is also respectfully requested to list the BEALE patent on a PTO-892 Form so as to complete the record in the present application and to confirm the consideration of this document.

In the outstanding Official Action, the Examiner indicated claims 18-29 as being allowed. The Examiner further indicated claims 2-17 are objected to for being dependent upon a rejected base claim. The Examiner further indicated that these claims would be allowable if rewritten into independent form including all the limitations of any base claim and any intervening claims.

By the present Response, and without in any manner acquiescing in the propriety of the Examiner's rejection of claim 1, Applicants have rewritten each of claims 2, 3, 5 and 13 into independent form. Claim 1 has been canceled. Accordingly, at least in accordance with the Examiner's indication, each of claims 2, 3, 5, 13 as well as those claims dependent thereon are now submitted to be in condition for allowance.

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In rewriting the various indicated-to-be-allowable dependent claims into independent form, Applicants have further revised the language of the claims to ensure and enhance clarity. Further, Applicants do not in any manner acquiesce in the propriety of the Examiner's rejection. Rather, Applicants are merely taking action to expedite the allowance of the present application by rewriting these claims into independent form. Accordingly, an official communication confirming the allowability of all of claims 2-39 is respectfully requested in due course.

In the outstanding Official Action, the Examiner set forth a Statement of Reasons for the Indication of Allowable Subject Matter. In this regard, while Applicants do not necessarily disagree with any of the various features listed therein, Applicants further point out that each of the claims defining an embodiment of the present invention are combination claims and that the patentability of each claim is based on a particular combination of features recited therein. Accordingly, the reasons for allowance should not be necessarily limited to those features noted by the Examiner.

Accordingly, Applicants respectfully request an indication of the allowability of all the claims pending in the present application, in due course. Such action is respectfully requested and is now believed to be appropriate and proper.

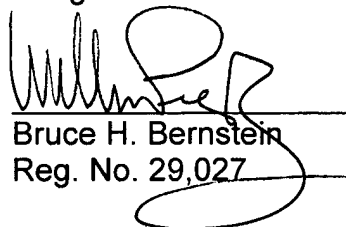
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Applicants have made a sincere effort to place the present application in condition for allowance and believe that they have now done so. Applicants have amended the specification to enhance clarity and have also amended various claims to eliminate informalities. Applicants have, without in any manner acquiescing in the propriety of the Examiner's rejection, rewritten various objected to dependent claims into independent form. Accordingly, Applicants have provided a clear evidentiary basis supporting the patentability of all the claims in the present application and respectfully request an indication to such effect in due course.

Any amendments to the claims which have been made in this amendment, and which have not been specifically noted to overcome a rejection based upon the prior art, should be considered to have been made for a purpose unrelated to patentability, and no estoppel should be deemed to attach thereto.

Should the Examiner have any questions or comments regarding this Response, or the present application, the Examiner is invited to contact the undersigned at the below-listed telephone number.

Respectfully submitted,
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